

VZCZCXYZ0026
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #1400/01 0592112
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 282112Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3037

UNCLAS BOGOTA 001400

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/AND
DEPARTMENT FOR H

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOC](#) [ECON](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL MCGOVERN

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Post welcomes CODEL McGovern to Colombia. With U.S. help, President Uribe has made great strides in fighting drug trafficking and terrorism. In January, the GOC presented a Plan Colombia consolidation phase strategy, with a heightened emphasis on social development. USAID programs aim to strengthen democratic institutions, foster a culture of human rights, create alternative development opportunities, and assist people displaced by internal violence. Colombia's human rights record is improving. Truth about links between paramilitaries, politicians and others is coming out as a result of the paramilitary demobilization and the Justice and Peace Law process. Exploratory talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN) are focused on establishing an agenda for formal negotiations and a ceasefire agreement; the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have yet to start talks with the GOC. The FARC has held three U.S. citizens for more than four years; their safe recovery is a top priority. The economy is growing, and the United States and Colombia signed a Free Trade Agreement in November 2006.
End Summary

U.S. Assistance

¶2. (SBU) On January 24, the GOC presented a Plan Colombia consolidation phase strategy. The proposal contains a heightened emphasis on social development, assigning new resources to human rights, displaced people, and Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. It also aims to reintegrate 42,000 demobilized ex-combatants and deserters and to promote Colombia's competitiveness and licit exports. The GOC is seeking funding from the United States and European countries.

¶3. (SBU) USG security assistance is designed to combat the interrelated threats of drug trafficking and terrorism and includes training, material aid, and guidance to security forces and other institutions. Uribe characterizes U.S. assistance as critical to the GOC's "Democratic Security" policy - aimed at establishing a state presence throughout national territory - and considers the United States to be Colombia's most important ally.

-- Plan Patriota: The military's multi-phased campaign to re-take areas dominated by the FARC is in its third year. The first phase, which focused on securing Cundinamarca Department around Bogota, pushed the FARC away from the capital and resulted in the deaths of five mid-level FARC commanders. The second, more complex phase is two years old and is focused on the FARC's traditional stronghold in

southern Colombia. The operation has disrupted the FARC's hold on the region, but sustainment of troops in this isolated region is difficult. Infectious diseases - especially leishmaniasis, a parasitic skin infection - and landmines are the leading causes of military casualties.

-- Despite the Colombian's military's success, the FARC continues to attack isolated or smaller police and military targets throughout the country, while avoiding direct contests with larger units. Three notable exceptions include the late December 2005 attack that killed 29 Colombian soldiers just outside of La Macarena National Park, two attacks on civilians, resulting in 17 dead and 14 injured, in southern Colombia in late February 2006, and a November 2006 attack that killed 17 police officers and three civilians in Tierralta, Cordoba Department.

-- Center for Coordinated Integral Action: With U.S. support, the GOC formed in 2005 an interagency center to facilitate delivery of social services in seven areas that have traditionally lacked state presence and been controlled by illegal armed groups. The Center focuses on providing immediate social services, including documentation, medical care, and longer-term development projects. More than 40,000 individuals have been enrolled in state health care. Judges, investigators, and public defenders have been placed in all 16 municipalities of the Plan Patriota area. A public library was opened in early 2006 in the town of San Vicente del Caguan, which served as the unofficial capital of the FARC's demilitarized zone during the peace process with President Pastrana.

----- Drug Eradication and Interdiction -----

14. (SBU) Eradication and interdiction are at record levels. The aerial eradication program exceeded the mid-year revised bilateral spray goal of 160,000 hectares of coca with a 2006 year-end total of 169,399 hectares sprayed. This was the sixth straight record spray year, and 24 percent more than the 2005 total. Moreover, the National Police and military forces seized over 203 metric tons of cocaine (HCl) and coca base in 2006, a near record quantity, and destroyed 200 HCl laboratories, also a record. The GOC reported the manual eradication of over 43,808 hectares of illicit crops in 2006 (including 42,111 hectares of coca and 1,697 hectares of opium poppy). Manual eradication remains costly in terms of human and mechanical resources: 41 security force personnel and civilian eradicators were killed in 2006 by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and narcoterrorist attacks. Manual eradication projects placed a heavy burden on the National Police to provide security for eradicators.

----- U.S. Assistance to Development and Democracy Building -----

15. (U) The USAID Mission in Colombia funds programs in three key strategic sectors. USAID's Democratic Governance programs aim to improve the transparency of the justice system, assist the peace process, promote respect for human rights, support democratic processes, and foster efficiency and accountability. USAID programs also promote legal alternative development opportunities through increased competitiveness, improved local government infrastructure and management, and a more favorable environment for investment and trade. Lastly, USAID provides support to nearly 2.7 million Colombians displaced by internal violence as well as children who have been forced to serve as child combatants. Colombia has the second largest population of internally displaced persons, behind only Sudan.

----- Military Justice and Improved Human Rights Record -----

16. (SBU) The Uribe Administration continues to make progress

on human rights cases involving military abuse or collaboration with paramilitaries. We continually stress the need for the legal system that delivers credible, timely results. Minister of Defense Santos has identified military justice reform as a top priority; in October, he named the first civilian - and the first woman - as director of the Military Criminal Justice System. In January 2007, MOD Santos relieved Colonel Hernan Mejia Gutierrez, a highly decorated colonel, from command of the 13th Mobile Brigade due to allegations tying him to former paramilitary leader Jorge 40. This was the first time the MOD had taken such action against an active commander for alleged paramilitary ties.

¶17. (U) On May 22, 2006, Colombian army soldiers gunned down 10 members of an elite judicial police squadron in Jamundi, Valle Department. These police officers had received DEA training and support and were part of a successful counter narcotics unit. 15 soldiers, including the battalion commander, are on trial for the crime. In June, the military and civilian justice systems signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that provided the Prosecutor General's office with the power to investigate and make jurisdictional recommendations in all alleged human rights cases against military defendants. Jamundi, for example, is in the civilian courts.

¶18. (U) Human rights training is mandatory for all members of the military and police. Less than two percent of human rights violations are attributable to government security forces, according to GOC statistics. In 2006, total homicides in Colombia fell by 5 percent to 17,281, the lowest level in 20 years, kidnappings by 14 percent to 687, and forced displacements by 20 percent to 172,722, building on trends from previous years. The GOC has a difficult but active dialogue with NGOs, the United Nations, and foreign governments. The local office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) has noted positive advancements in the GOC's human rights record, but has also expressed concerns over alleged extrajudicial killings by the military.

¶19. (SBU) There has been investigative and judicial progress in several high profile human rights cases. In January 2007, the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia) announced the indictments and arrests of seven soldiers on homicide charges in the January 21, 2006 killing of Edilberto Vasquez Cardona of the Arenas Alta Peace Community in San Jose de Apartado. In February 2007, the Fiscalia summoned 68 soldiers of the 17th Brigade to a formal interrogation hearing into the February 21, 2005 massacre of eight members of the San Jose de Apartado peace community. Also in February 2007, authorities arrested five suspects in the January 31 killing of Yolanda Izquierdo, leader of a group representing displaced persons reclaiming paramilitary-occupied land in Monteria. Police expect more arrests in the case.

¶10. (SBU) Other long standing human rights cases, such as the 1998 Santo Domingo case and the 1997 Mapiripan massacre, are delayed in courts, pending decisions by the judges. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Burns has repeatedly raised

SIPDIS

these cases with both President Uribe and the Prosecutor General, and Embassy officers regularly meet with senior GOC and Fiscalia officials to press for resolution in these cases.

Extradition

¶11. (SBU) President Uribe is a strong supporter of the U.S.-Colombia extradition relationship. Since taking office, he has approved over 430 extraditions to the United States. President Uribe has approved but suspended the extradition of four AUC leaders to ensure their continued cooperation in the AUC demobilization process.

Demobilization and Peace Process

¶12. (SBU) Over 32,000 former paramilitaries have demobilized since 2002, and a further 11,000 have deserted from all illegal armed groups (about half from the FARC). Some renegade former AUC members have joined new criminal groups. The reinsertion program has limited funding and logistical problems, but is slowly improving. In FY06, Congress approved up to USD 20 million in demobilization assistance, subject to certification. Consultations continue with the Congress regarding the U.S. intention to spend USD 15.5 million in FY06. The USG has also demarched numerous allies, with some success, to financially support these processes. The GOC currently pays 96 percent of the Reintegration Program's budget, while the international community pays 4 percent. Reintegration Commissioner Frank Pearl, who has been in charge of the Reintegration Program since September 2006, will launch a Capital Investment Fund with the support of Bill Gates on March 19 in Cartagena to raise funds for reintegration. Pearl has warned, however, that completely abolishing former paramilitary networks will be more complex and take longer than anticipated.

¶13. (SBU) The Justice and Peace Law confessions (version libres) of ex-paramilitary chiefs began with ex-leader Salvatore Mancuso testifying in December. Rigorous implementation of the law and ensuring the safety of witnesses and victims are key to ensuring peace and justice in Colombia. The version libre and related processes continue to reveal truths that no other Colombian administration has come close to discovering. Eight Congressmen and the former chief of the Administrative Security Department (DAS), Jose Noguera, are in jail; one Congressman is on the run in Europe; and five others have been called to testify in the Supreme Court. President Uribe strongly supports the Colombian Supreme Court's investigations into links between paramilitaries and politicians, and provided the funding needed for the Supreme Court to set up its own investigative unit to probe deeper.

¶14. (SBU) The ELN has been negotiating with the GOC for over a year, but it is unclear whether it is ready to implement a cease-fire. The U.S. supports a process that leads to ELN cease-fire, disarmament, and demobilization. The FARC and the GOC had publicly announced their willingness to enter into talks, but an October 19 car bomb attack that left 17 injured led President Uribe to revoke outreach efforts as long as the FARC continued to commit terrorist acts. Both sides sporadically reiterate their interest in negotiating a humanitarian exchange, but have been unable to agree on the conditions for initiating talks on the issue.

U.S. Hostages

¶15. (SBU) The three U.S. contractors captured by the FARC in February 2003 are the longest held U.S. hostages in the world. Their safe release continues to be a top priority. The Colombians are providing full assistance. Uribe has assured us that the U.S. hostages will be included in any humanitarian exchange. The Embassy held a commemoration ceremony on February 13, marking the fourth anniversary of their capture. In January, former Development Minister Fernando Araujo escaped from six years of FARC captivity after an army rescue attempt. In February, a military operation resulted in the rescue an army captain whom the ELN had allegedly kidnapped in 2003.

Labor

¶16. (U) In June 2006, the GOC, trade confederations, and

business representatives signed a Tripartite Accord at International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva, removing Colombia from discussion in the ILO's Committee for the Application of Standards for the first time in 21 years. Under the accord, a resident ILO representative was sent to Colombia, and he began his functions in January. The agreement also committed the government to financing the ILO Special Technical Cooperation program and allocated USD 1.5 million to the Fiscalía to combat impunity for violence against trade unionists. To date, the GOC has assigned nearly 100 prosecutorial and investigative personnel to investigate 200 cases of violence against trade unionists, prioritized by the trade confederations. Labor leaders and the UNHCHR's local representative have praised the initiative.

¶17. (U) Although trade unionists continue to be victims of violence - from the FARC, renegade paramilitaries, and common crime - the GOC continues to demonstrate its commitment to protect labor union leaders and members. In 2006 alone, the GOC's Protection Program assisted over 1,200 trade unionists, with over 40 percent of its annual USD 21 million budget providing protection measures for them. In total, the Colombian Government also provides protection to over 10,000 human rights activists, journalists, politicians, witnesses and other individuals under threat.

Positive Economic Outlook

¶18. (U) Significant gains in security have helped boost the Colombian economy. Colombia's exports and imports each increased more than 20 percent in 2005, and the U.S. is Colombia's largest trade partner (approximately 40 percent of exports and 28 percent of imports). Colombian exports to the U.S. have grown USD 1 billion per year since ATPDEA's inception in late 2002, while U.S. exports to Colombia increased approximately USD 2 billion. The largest U.S. investors - Drummond (coal), ChevronTexaco and ExxonMobil - are planning considerable expansion due to the improved investment climate. In the third quarter of 2006, Colombia's gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 7.7 percent. Inflation in 2006 was 4.5 percent, the lowest rate in 50 years. 2005 Foreign Direct Investment increased to USD 5.6 billion, an increase of 50 percent over 2004, and first quarter 2006 FDI totaled USD 978 million, which is an increase of 6.8 percent over the same period in 2005. Unemployment fell from 18 percent when President Uribe took office to a little more than 11 percent in October 2006.

¶19. (SBU) On November 22, 2006 Colombia and the U.S. signed a Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). The agreement will provide stronger IP protection and give increased market access to key U.S. industrial and agricultural exports. For Colombia, the agreement will create a more attractive investment climate, lock in ATPDEA benefits, and expand employment opportunities for small and medium-sized business. The U.S. Congress recently approved a six month extension of the ATPDEA to promote tariff relief for Colombian businesses as ratification on the TPA moves forward.
DRUCKER